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## **Students Turn Stylish Creations Into Instagram Business Success**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- In an era marked by social distancing and customer caution toward shopping in brick and mortar stores, Cedarville juniors Keziah Stockdale and Jessie Gerakinis took to Instagram to turn their passion for handmade style into a successful online business.

Awe & Co. launched in May 2019 as an online business specializing in polymer clay jewelry, "patch pants" and a handful of other fashion staples ranging from canvas dresses to beaded necklaces. Stockdale, the seamstress, and Gerakinis, the jeweler, work together to create quality products with a unique flair.

"Jess and I met our freshman year through a mutual friend and quickly realized we had similar styles and interests, and we both liked to make things," Stockdale, an exercise science major from Frankfort, Michigan, said. "Then one day, Jess posted a picture of me wearing a pair of patch pants I'd made, and tons of people responded asking where they could get ones like them. I think that's when we first got the idea."

Though excited about the prospect of a business, neither wanted to rush the process.

"We prayed a ton over it," Gerakinis, a visual communication design major from Allendale, Michigan, said. "It was just an idea then, but as we both prayed and went through Scripture, we were struck by how often "awe" kept coming up. I was in the Psalms at the time, and Keziah had been listening to the song "The Stand" by Hillsong. The more we read, the more "awe" came to mean to us."

When Stockdale and Gerakinis eventually settled on their company name, Awe & Co., they drew directly from Psalm 65, which they point clients to through their online platforms.

"Our goal is to help people experience the awe of the creator from what has been created," Gerakinis said.

Once establishing their goals, company and [Instagram account](#), Stockdale and Gerakinis began making products. Typically, they make their products at home over school breaks and then post them for sale in online launches upon returning to campus.

"We were so shocked by how much success we had right away," Stockdale said. "We sold out of everything, and people kept asking when we'd have more for sale." This achievement set a precedent for Stockdale and Gerakinis, as they have continued to sell out during each of their subsequent product launches.

Both founders heavily credit their business evolution and success to Cedarville's [Beyond Student Startup Accelerator](#) and Kyle Peterson, its deputy director, who prompted them to better understand their clientele, develop a website, reconsider their manufacturing process and refine their business goals.

"We learned so much through the entrepreneurship accelerator," Gerakinis added. "Kyle Peterson is incredible. As Keziah and I took the course, I started developing [our website](#), and that has been a much stronger platform for us."

"Keziah and Jessie had already proven market traction when they participated in last spring's business accelerator, but they were limited by the number of sales channels and inventory," Peterson said. "They were assigned to reevaluate their supply chain, develop a marketing plan and construct an eCommerce website."

Moving forward, Stockdale and Gerakinis have goals that include narrowing their mission statement, experimenting with product styles, focusing on product consistency and creating custom orders.

They continue to be grateful for the opportunity to combine entrepreneurship with creativity.

"I used to make little earrings when I was a kid and sell them to friends in a little 'store' I made in my basement," Gerakinis shared. "I'm always going to be making and selling things. We both will. We love it."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,550 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its [MBA in innovation and entrepreneurship](#), strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit [www.cedarville.edu](http://www.cedarville.edu).

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